

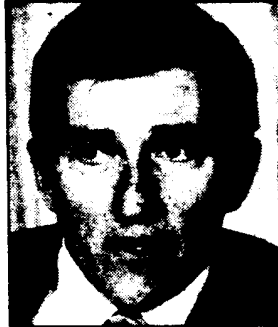
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USA TODAY
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INQUIRY

Topic: NAVY vs. SPIES

John F. Lehman Jr., 43, secretary of the Navy since 1981, has an extensive background in arms control and foreign affairs. He worked for the National Security Council during the Nixon administration, serving under then-Secretary of State Henry Kissinger, and later became deputy director of the Arms Control and Disarmament Agency. Lehman was interviewed by USA TODAY's editorial board.



John F. Lehman Jr.

Spying damage made us run a tighter ship

USA TODAY: Another trial in the Walker spy ring case is about to start. Are you worried that it's going to show these guys really hurt us as far as naval communications are concerned?

LEHMAN: No, because I think we've been fairly consistent and frank about how badly they did clean our clock. The only good part of the news is that what has been compromised is largely time-sensitive. In other words, it was very critical while it was happening. They were reading our sensitive communications of fleet operations for a long time, and there may have been some military impact during the Vietnam operation. Johnny Walker was in one of the naval ships off Vietnam during part of the bombing campaign.

USA TODAY: And he was spying at that point?

LEHMAN: Yes.

USA TODAY: Do you know how much damage was done?

LEHMAN: We're continuing to do evaluations, but the larger part of the damage was that our systems of communications, some of our hardware, codes, and so forth were compromised, and it helped to give the Soviets what we bureaucrats call "ground truth." When you're doing a big exercise, and you think there's a sub here, here, and here, and you

have data and ambiguous references, it's of inestimable value to know where they really are.

USA TODAY: Are you confident that you've caught everybody who was in that ring?

LEHMAN: No. I don't think we can say yet that we know with certainty that we have everyone who was in that ring.

USA TODAY: So there may be other moles in the Navy right now?

LEHMAN: It is certainly possible.

USA TODAY: Do you think it is likely?

LEHMAN: I think it is likely that there are other Soviet agents in a great many other public and private institutions in the country, so I think the probability is high that there are a significant number of other agents as yet uncovered in government and in the private sector. As to the Navy, all I can say is we've tightened up significantly. We had security shortcomings of a substantial nature that this case uncovered, and we are now making very significant changes.

USA TODAY: Such as?

LEHMAN: We've reduced the total number of clearances by more than 40 percent since the Walker case. We do spot checks going on and off ships, and in the handling of highly

classified information aboard ship, there always have to be two people operating together. It used to be you'd worry about how many carbon copies were made of a given document. Now computer terminals all over the world can produce instantaneous copies in multiple numbers that just make handling the sheer volume — I mean, the average ship gets 500 lengthy messages a day in hard copy, and we're trying to do our best to cut down on the physical numbers of data.

USA TODAY: Are you using polygraphs?

LEHMAN: Yes. We're now doing that as part of an overall Department of Defense initiative.

USA TODAY: Do you think the lie detector works?

LEHMAN: Yes, I do. I think it has shortcomings. But in the hands of a well-trained technician, it is a very reliable tool. But it is only one tool. I would never support using the polygraph for disciplinary action, but it does give us a very useful tool to say, "Well, this is a person we ought to look at a little more closely." The polygraph can just give you an indicator there needs to be attention put on one person or on one area and so forth. And it's a very significant deterrent.

USA TODAY: How good are the Soviets?

LEHMAN: The Soviets are good. They are not as good as we are, but they are very good and very much better than they were just five years ago.

USA TODAY: Why do you think our sailors are better than theirs?

LEHMAN: Our sailors are better trained, but also they start with a much higher base of familiarity with the technology. The average American sailor had his own car when he was in high school, and he's an Atari-generation kid. He's comfortable with high tech and he's comfortable with mechanical engineering kinds of things. That's not true in the average Soviet conscript. It's all new to them. Nor do they train as much as we do. They don't fly as much.

USA TODAY: What's the difference?

LEHMAN: In the Navy, our optimum is about 25 hours of flight time per month per air crew. In the Soviet Union, it's about 10. Well, there's a direct

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